

Northern New Mexico Design Influences by Kurt Faust

There are numerous influences for our Northern New Mexico sense of design which can be found in the idioms of the early mission churches, the Indian pueblos and rural dwellings, the Anasazi ruins, and the household articles crafted by the early settlers and Native Americans during the 17th and 18th century.

From the Anasazi ruins we find evidence of the use of vigas or logs, as structural members to hold up the flat roof. They show some fine examples of stacked stone (especially at Chaco Canyon), the south facing courtyard, and the round shape of the kiva.

Taos Pueblo, much the same today as it was when the Spaniards arrived in the late 1500's, with its soft rounded adobe walls and multi levels shows the small windows and doors and the massive walls used to protect the interior from the summer heat.

From the early dwellings we learn how latillas were used to span between the vigas to hold up the sod roofs. Many types of small trees were used for this purpose such as small aspens, young spruce or ponderosa pine, split cedar branches or what ever other scraggly material was at hand. On the interior sometimes the latillas were covered with plaster between the vigas creating a coved ceiling which kept so much dirt from falling through onto the occupants below. Canales, used to direct rain water off of the roof and away from the walls of the house, were often made from a section of hollow log.

The Spanish developed a "U" shaped courtyard house which offered protection from hostile forces. Often, the courtyard was entered through a zaguan, or a thick walled passageway containing large double doors for passage of livestock and wagons with a smaller door installed in one of the larger doors for everyday pedestrian usage.

The mission churches needed especially thick walls due to the height of their adobe walls. Some of the most beautiful forms come from the thick buttresses functioning to hold the walls up. The buildings of a church would attract the areas finest craftsmen. These craftsmen would build the doors, railings and other details. Ornate carving often embellished the woodwork and carrying beams. Corbels were often used to hold up the ends of the beams and help with the long structural spans.

Decorative elements from Anasazi and Pueblo pottery and patterns from woven baskets and textiles are deeply ingrained into the regional style. Influences found their way into the designs of furniture, doors, and just about every household item needed for early frontier life.

The craftsman who immigrated employed the local population to help in the trades. The local craftsmen in turn added their own influence to the objects they made. Our regional style owes much of its development to the relative isolation of the cultures working together for two

centuries in their remote location. This is the reason Santa Fe has such a unique style.

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